

NSC BRIEFING

18 August 1960
25X1

LAOS

- I. Crisis in Laos, which last weekend appeared to be reaching resolution, has entered new phase.
- II. General Phoumi, defense minister in the just-resigned Somsanith government, has set in motion his counter-coup effort.
 - A. On 16 August, Phoumi's C-47 dropped leaflets on Vientiane announcing his intention to retake Vientiane by force.
 - B. Upwards of 500 infantry troops are now reported to be en route from Luang Prabang to Vientiane via river craft on the Mekong River.
 1. These elements will probably debark a little way up river from Vientiane and await further orders. Their arrival expected shortly. 25X1

- [REDACTED]
- C. Another 500 troops from Pakse (south Laos) now in Savannakhet (south-central Laos). They expect to be in Vientiane by Sunday. *Advance elements this group reportedly attacked near Pak Sane -- possibly by Pathet Lao.*
- [REDACTED]

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- III. A ranking member of Phoumi's counterrevolutionary group has given in broad outline Phoumi's plan to retake Vientiane.

State Department review completed

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- [REDACTED]
- A. He has in mind a coordinated assault on the city using air-dropped paratroopers, ground elements brought in from Xieng Khouang Province, and the troops now coming down the river from Luang Prabang.



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- C. Small armored elements, ostensibly under rebel leader Kong Le's control in Vientiane, are also said to be ready to rise up when the attack begins.
- IV. Phoumi has embarked on his course seemingly undeterred by his weak supply position and by the questionable willingness of his troops actually to exchange fire with their compatriots in Vientiane.
- A. He claims all military regions are still loyal to him, but how far down into the ranks this loyalty extends remains to be seen.
- B. Phoumi is short of funds, supplies and air transport.

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- C. France's refusal to permit him to use its Seno base is blow to Phoumi and may oblige him to transfer his headquarters from nearby Savannakhet, possibly to Pakse farther south.
- V. Phoumi appears to have rallied the bulk of the Somsanith cabinet to his side.

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- A. He claims that nine of its 13 members are actively supporting him and that two others, including Somsanith, are neutral.
- B. Phoumi group also claims that King Savang secretly in sympathy with its aims, but it is questionable king has actually given unequivocal assurance of support.

VI. Danger inherent in Phoumi's military moves is possibility Kong Le may call in Communist Pathet Lao and take retaliatory measures against his foreign and Laotian hostages in Vientiane.

- A. Kong Le has reportedly rejected previous offers of Pathet assistance but may change his mind.
- B. Ambassador Brown is concerned over the security of American dependents and is taking preliminary measures for their possible evacuation.

VII. Meanwhile, Souvanna Phouma has formed a neutralist government which quickly received the endorsement of the National Assembly. Fact that rebels had tank trained on assembly casts doubt on Souvanna's claim vote was not taken under duress.

- A. Most disturbing appointment is that of left-wing neutralist Quinim Pholsena as interior minister.
 - 1. Quinim heads the Santiphab Party, which was in parliamentary alliance with the pro-Communist Neo Lao Hak Sat when both groups were still represented in assembly.
 - 2. Most of others are relative unknowns.
- B. Cabinet very small and will probably be expanded if it stays in office.

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- C. King must administer oath to government according to constitution, and Phoumi forces will try to get him to stall on this point. *Chief of Royal Protocol in Luang Prabang states King considers Souvanna government unsuitable.*
- VIII. Kong Le is beginning to show signs of having personal political ambitions.
- A. He told some Thai reporters that the Souvanna government was strictly a provisional one and that his newly formed Youth Party would be the only legal political party once order is restored.
1. Souvanna has also described his government as provisional.
- B. Kong Le also said that, although he would remain a captain, he intended to assume control of the army in order to protect himself and his colleagues.
- IX. There is thus some danger that we may eventually be faced with an Asian Castro if the situation is not soon normalized, either through negotiations or successful counteraction by Phoumi.
- A. Peiping and Hanoi, apparently still assessing the situation, have broadcast the standard line expressing "resolute support for the Laotian people in its struggle against American imperialism."

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